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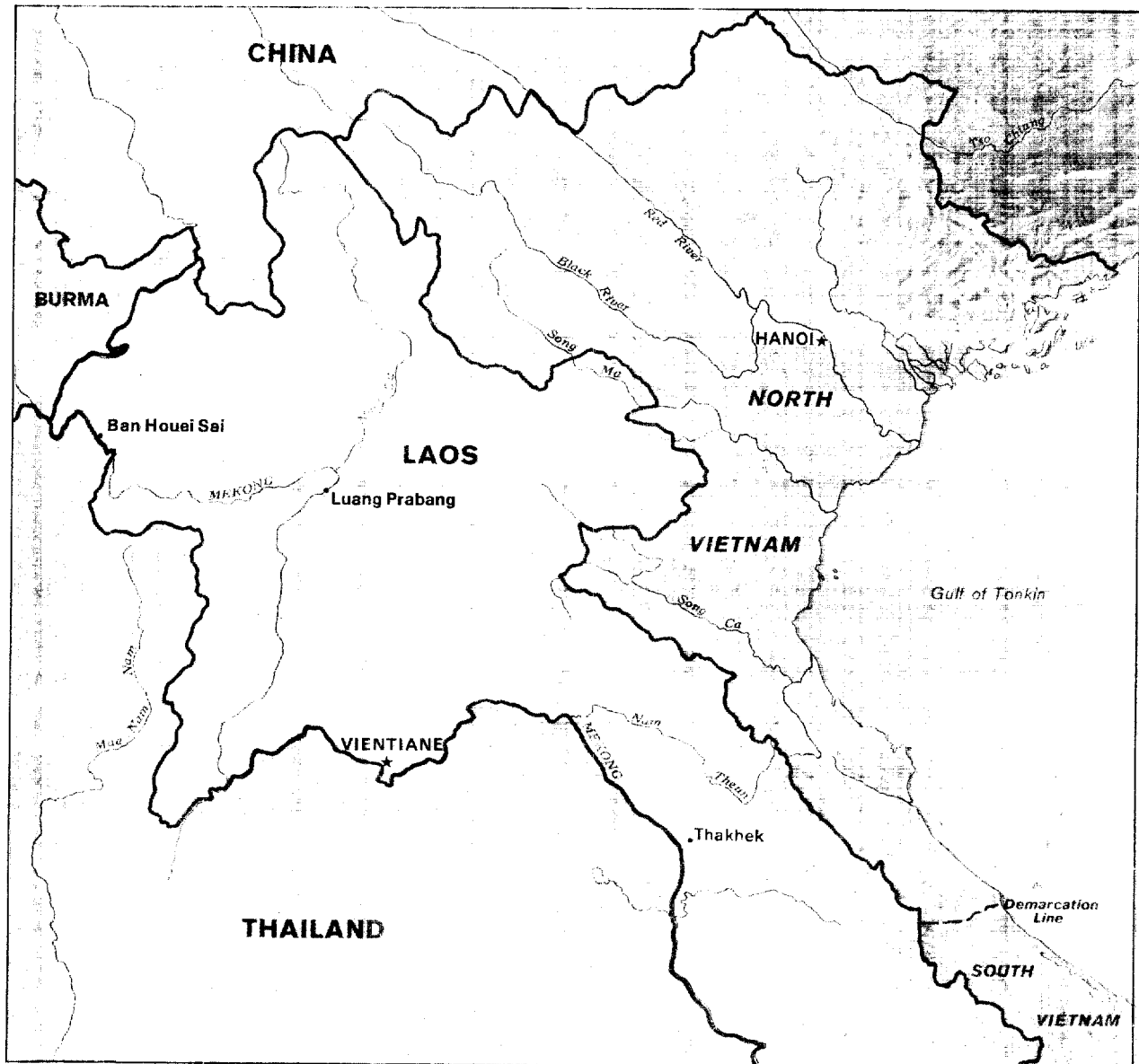
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LAOS

The Royal Lao Army reportedly has placed the non-Communist - controlled provincial capital of Thakhek, in central Laos, under martial law after a week of civil disorder.

The disturbances began on January 6, when a small group of local public works employees and student sympathizers staged a demonstration over economic and political grievances. The protest apparently was masterminded by a person described as a "left-leaning local rabble-rouser" who has been a leading instigator of labor unrest in the Thakhek area over the past several months.

Fearing a repetition of last month's events in the provincial capital of Ban Houei Sai, which embarrassed the non-Communist political and military establishment, Royal Lao Army forces moved quickly to seal off the town. The protesters were isolated in several government buildings they had seized.

There has been no violence within the city thus far, and, unlike the uprising at Ban Houei Sai, no dissident non-Communist forces or Pathet Lao troops have been involved in the unrest. Public sympathy and support for the protesters has spread to other urban areas in the non-Communist - controlled zone, however--particularly in the wake of a shooting incident along the approaches to Thakhek. On January 9, Royal Lao Army troops--apparently in self-defense--fired into a group of several hundred villagers attempting to march on Thakhek from the south in a show of support for the protesters. At least one villager was killed, and ten others were wounded.

Senior non-Communist political and military leaders are attempting to minimize the potential seriousness of the situation at Thakhek, primarily in an effort to prevent the Pathet Lao from capitalizing on it politically, as they did during the troubles at Ban Houei Sai.

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The non-Communists insist that they are firmly in control at Thakhek, but prolonged occupation of the city by the Royal Lao Army--especially if aggravated by any further shooting incidents--could backfire politically against them. Moreover, there is danger that local Pathet Lao troops in the Thakhek area might support the protesters--as they did at Ban Houei Sai--thus raising the possibility of a military confrontation with Royal Lao Army forces.

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GUATEMALA

The outlawed Guatemalan Communist Party may resume acts of terrorism to avenge the execution of its secretary general, Huberto Alvarado, by a government death squad three weeks ago.

After a similar incident in September 1972, in which a government death squad captured and allegedly killed six members of the party's Central Committee, the party had opted to abstain from terrorist activity. Now, however, the head of the party's terrorist group, Joaquin Noval, seems likely to take over as leader of the party. If so, the chances are that the party and its terrorist action arm will retaliate with violence of its own.

Little if any effort was made to conceal the government's involvement in Alvarado's death. He was captured by army and police forces during a shootout on December 20 as he and other party members were trying to collect a kidnap ransom. The following day his body, showing signs of torture, was found along a highway near Guatemala City.

The execution leaves no doubt that the government of President Laugerud intends to be as vigorous and brutal as its predecessor in countering the terrorism of the Communists and other extreme leftists. Stern, revengeful anti-communism is basic to Laugerud's military and religious background, and nothing is likely to change his outlook.

Government forces are strong enough to keep the lid on the security situation. Isolated successes by terrorists followed by government reprisals could, however, create a period of political instability.

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